



Photo by Amy Halloran

Frack No

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On Monday, more than 600 New Yorkers came to Albany to address their legislators and call for a ban on hydrofracking. More than that number gathered in the Legislative Office Building for a rally before people dispersed to talk with their senators and representatives in the Assembly. A number of legislators spoke at that rally, riling up a sp crowd.

Sen. Tony Avella (D-Queens) advised everyone to demand a ban. "There can be no compromise on this issue," he stated, to cheers and applause. "Compromise means New York State will end up like Pennsylvania and we're not going to accept that. This is a battle that we can win because of you!"

Eric Weltman of Food and Water Watch named the New York State Senate and Assembly bills that would ban hydrofracking, and told people that they

should name those bills in their arguments upstairs. Fracking is dangerous and uncontrollable, he said. “There are safer alternatives to natural gas, but there is no alternative to water,” he told people to more applause. The remarks continued for a good hour, with Sen. Liz Krueger (D-Manhattan) comparing the human thunder at the rally to the earthquakes linked to fracking in Ohio. Prior to the rally, earthquakes were discussed at a press conference arranged by Schoharie Valley Watch and Sustainable Otsego.

“Much of New York State is seismically active,” said geologist Paul Rubin. “Excessive lubrication of faults and fractures with highly pressurized hydraulic fracturing fluids, bolstered by repeated hydrofracking episodes, may result in fault activation and bedrock settlement [earthquakes].” Rubin and Arthur Palmer, another geologist, also addressed the water issues raised by these problems.

The two criticized the Supplemental Generic Environmental Impact Statement (SGEIS)—the DEC document that received more than 40,000 public comments—for not including comprehensive fault mapping from 2002. Nor were the most comprehensive aquifer maps included in the document.

Many speakers at the rally want the DEC to throw out the SGEIS and start fresh. Actress Debra Winger spoke briefly. Josh Fox, whose film *Gasland* has been a tool for informing the public about the dangers of fracking, addressed the crowd with a greeting referring to the second country in the world to ban fracking, following the lead of France.

“Good morning my fellow Bulgarians,” he said.

Bulgaria banned hydrofracking after rounds of protests involving thousands of people and street theater. One image sticks out from the demonstrations: farmers and activists goose-stepping while holding aloft loaves of bread. The food was emblematic of the loss Bulgaria would face if they approved the fracking permits Chevron requested; the location of those permits was the country’s grain-growing region.

Biologist Sandra Steingraber, who has been crusading against hydrofracking, asked the crowd what Harriet Tubman and Bulgaria had in common.

“Abolition!” she said, detailing how Bulgarians got their government to understand their opinion by protesting in the streets until the parliament voted 166 to 6 for a permanent ban on hydrofracking. “So, New York, are we meeker than the Bulgarians? Are we more frightened? Are we more resigned to a toxic future?”

The crowd answered a resounding no.

Next up was baker Stefan Senders, who hatched a plan to echo Bulgaria’s bread march when Steingraber and he were discussing Bulgaria’s success as the activist picked up her weekly loaf of Wide Awake Bread.

Senders baked 100 loaves of bread for Monday’s protest using locally grown and milled grains from Farmer Ground Flour, a cooperative mill.

“This is a good economy, a wise economy, a steady economy for the state of New York,” Senders told the crowd. “This bread is a commitment to the health of New York.”

Bread is a jobs program, noted Steingraber as the bread was distributed through the crowd.

Wes Gillingham of Catskill Mountainkeeper explained that farmers would lead a march of bread up to the governor’s office.

“Farmer said, Break Bread, Not Shale!” came the chant. People who had appointments with their legislators dispersed, and farmers led the way: Thor Oechsner, who grows grain for the bread Stefan Senders bakes, among them.

The people and bread snaked through the guts of the Legislative Office Building up to the Capitol, the sounds of the chants changing as the shape of the hallways morphed. The group ended in the War Room, under the murals of warriors painted on the domed ceiling, still chanting, “Break Bread, Not Shale!”

Governor Cuomo declined to receive the gift of the bread, but people stacked their loaves in a pile.